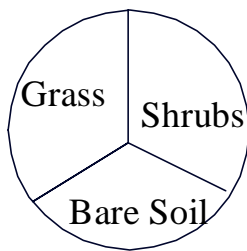




THE COVEY HEADQUARTERS

Volume 5 Issue 4 Winter 2006

This newsletter is aimed at cooperators and sportspeople in Missouri to provide information on restoring quail. This is a joint effort of the Missouri Department of Conservation, USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service, University of Missouri Extension and Quail Unlimited. If you would like to be removed from this mailing list or have suggestions for future articles please contact jeff.powelson@mdc.mo.gov or 816-232-6555 x122 or write to the address shown.



The name of this newsletter is taken from an old concept.....that a quail covey operates from a headquarters (shrubby cover). If the rest of the covey's habitat needs are nearby, a covey should be present. We are encouraging landowners to manage their quail habitat according to this concept. Use shrubs as the cornerstone for your quail management efforts. Manage for a diverse grass, broadleaf weed and legume mixture and provide bare ground with row crops, food plots or light disking **right next to** the shrubby area.

The Best Nesting Grass for Quail...Not Much at All

John Murphy, Private Land Conservationist, Kirksville, MO

At the risk of sounding heretical, I would suggest to you fellow quail managers something a bit radical for Missouri. Bobwhite quail do not need a lot of grass to thrive. Not only do they not need vast amounts, but the *structure* of the grass they do need is rare in much of Missouri. I would contend that where quail are doing well in Missouri is where the grass is irregularly patterned and in stands that we would call "thin". Granted, this goes against years of sowing vast amounts of grass, fertilizing grass, burning to encourage grass, and bad mouthing managers who have a poor stand of grass.

Did you know that Missouri is second, behind Texas, in the nation for cow-calf numbers? This is partly because, due to our climate and soils, we can grow grass like nobody's business. The only reason Texas beats us out is because of their size, and Missouri could grow more tonnage of brome hay on a forty, than Texas could put together in a section. Do you know what else Texas has?...quail. Due to sandy soils and dry conditions, grasses in states like Texas, parts of Oklahoma, and Kansas stay clumpy and spread out. Very rarely do grasses get to form a dense sod. We in Missouri aren't happy unless every field and knob is a manicured sea of green carpet, and it's not that hard for us to get there.

The "clumpiness" of grass, with about one year's worth of litter, is what quail need for successful nesting. Quail need at least 8" high grass at nesting time surrounded by even more brood rearing cover. Quail also tend to nest near field edges, so don't worry about areas hundreds of feet from field edges.

It isn't just a *lack* of grass that quail enjoy; southern Iowa is proof of that. It seems that they thrive when the rank grass is exchanged for the structure provided by broadleaf plants. Also, it doesn't seem to be an issue of warm-season grass vs. cool-season grass, although warm-season grasses stay "clumpier" longer. Too much grass is still too much grass. It just so happens, that when we set back grass in Missouri, we get weeds. In some cases, these weeds could be thistles or even locust sprouts, and we deal with them as they come. Many times however, these "weeds" are ragweed, foxtail, and desmodium that have been lying dormant under a blanket of grass. I've even had the pleasure of seeing blazing star, coneflower, and sensitive briar pop up in a 13-year-old CRP stand when the brome was suppressed.

A problem we face in much of Missouri is that the broadleaf response we get from hurting grass is relatively short lived. Miles of bare dirt firebreaks established one year ago are already socked in with brome and fescue.

The same is true for fields of Indiangrass, fescue, and brome that were burned with the intent of hurting grass. The results tend to last for 2 years at the most. Of course, we are talking about biological systems that can vary from county to county, and year to year.

If we know what quail like for nesting, let's address the scale of management. Some of the best quail management models will recommend that your property should have around 30% quality nesting cover. That is not a very large chunk of the farm. Often, in planning, we gloss over this number; however, if we do the math, we might be surprised as to what work lies ahead of us. Let's hypothetically say that you own 200 acres in north Missouri. Let's assume 160 acres of it is in CRP and the remainder is timber and wooded draws. Based on the quail models, in any given year, only 48 acres of the grass would be in good nesting cover. That means you have 112 acres of remaining vegetation that need to be in varying levels of disturbance. Of course, on this farm, you would have to adhere to CRP management guidelines; however, this can be a daunting workload when you realize how fast the grass grows back. So what does one do? You know your schedule and budget better than anybody. Strive to have that 30%, but realize you may not get there every year. It would be better for quail if that 30% of good nesting cover was interspersed throughout your property. It would be of more benefit to your farm if the entire property was in "fair" to "good" habitat, as opposed to having a 20 acre block of "tricked out" cover.

I realize that this "anti-grass" mentality may not sit well with the "forage minded" folks, but my intent with this article is not to evaluate average daily gains in steers. In Missouri, managing for thick monocultures of grass and trying to manage for quail on the same acres do not go together.

More Watersheds Eligible for Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program

The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) is a voluntary land retirement program that helps producers protect environmentally sensitive land, decrease erosion, restore wildlife habitat, and protect ground and surface water. Enrollment in CREP is limited to specific watersheds in Missouri, but the program is available in all or part of 79 of Missouri's 114 counties. Practices include field borders, filter strips, prairie restoration, and wetland development to name a few. All practices must be planted to a mix of native warm-season grasses and wildflowers. Mid-contract management is required on most grass practices. CREP offers extra incentives to encourage enrollment. Annual rental payments of over \$100 per acre are possible and sign-up bonuses of \$100 to \$350 per acre depending on your soil type and the practice you choose. Contact your local FSA office to see if your land qualifies for the program.

Build it and they will come...

Larry Balk, Vernon Co. has enrolled several acres into the CP-21 filter strip, CP-33 quail buffer, and general CRP practices. All practices were planted to native warm-season grasses. On this 380 acre farm, his quail numbers have gone from 1 covey 5 years ago (before any management began) to at least 8 coveys last season. He plans to do more edge feathering, strip disking, and prescribed burning in the next few years to increase his covey numbers even further. Habitat is what it takes! **Scott Sudkamp, Vernon Co.**

I had heard from the Missouri Department of Conservation that edge feathering was good for quail and pheasants. I decided to try a little. I had a contractor with a bobcat clipper cut about a ¼ mile of tree line. I was impressed by his speed and neat work. I was told edge feathering would improve my pheasant and quail habitat, and in time I would see more birds. What I did not know was that I would see "instant pheasants". Within a few days after the clipping was completed I went back to take a look at it. I was surprised to see 6 pheasants running up and down the edge feathered area. Two roosters and 4 hens were checking out the edge feathering like clients in Florida picking the best condominiums for housing. To my amazement when I came over the terrace the 6 pheasants flew not into the next field as usual, but instead flew directly 30 feet into the downed tree line. I had never seen this type of behavior by pheasants before. I turned around slowly so I would not spook them and drove home. I am looking forward to hunting this fall. **Geoffrey Brown, Atchison Co.**

We had a successful burn on our warm-season grass field. It's absolutely amazing how easy (and fun) it is to do when you know a bit about it, mow and disk your fire lines, understand how it will act, and the conditions are right. As a by-product of burning, we had an outbreak of sericea lespedeza, but dealt with that (Remedy) on an experimental basis in July, and will have to wait until next year to "hit it hard" now that I know what it takes to control it. Debbie and I saw two coveys this past weekend. One was 22 birds, the other was 18. These are the most birds I have seen on this farm since the 1960's. Saw a covey using the warm-season grass field in early summer. Anyway, lot's of good things happening. Debbie and I went to the Quail/Ag seminar at the MU Bradford Research Center in Columbia, MO a few weeks ago. This was a very impressive area and an excellent program. **David Deibel, Jefferson Co.**

Quail Unlimited Adds Another Gun To It's Arsenal

The Ozark Border Bobwhites chapter was formed in May of this year to serve Maries, Osage, Gasconade and eastern Franklin Counties; however the committee has elected to help in other areas as demand dictates. The chapter has set several goals for the upcoming year including establishing an annual youth event and support local youth activities dealing with outdoor education, outdoor skills and firearm/hunting safety. They also plan to raise funds to take advantage of a Quail Unlimited/Missouri Department of Conservation habitat program, the Missouri Quail Habitat Initiative (QHI) that provides a dollar match for every dollar the chapter dedicates to the program. QHI funds are used to improve habitat on private property.

In 2005, Quail Unlimited, nationwide, was responsible for \$4.1 million dollars in habitat expenditures through chapters, partners and value of seed distributed. A distinctive feature of Quail Unlimited is local chapters retain a majority of the funds they raise to be spent locally, at the discretion of the local committee. Last year, through the efforts of Quail Unlimited obtaining grants and donations from outside sources, the national average of funds available to local chapters equaled 138% of the funds they raised within their community. Last year, Missouri chapters were responsible for \$724,374 in habitat expenditures through chapters, partners and value of seed distributed. For more information about Quail Unlimited visit www.qu.org.

5th Annual Covey Headquarters Tour Jeff Powelson, Chairman, Heartland Chapter Quail Unlimited

In the pre-dawn hours of October 7th, 2006, it looked as if there was a covey of people ready to be flushed by a high dollar bird dog. At 5:45am a group of landowners were standing in a perfect circle, under the fluorescent beams of the parking lot lights in front of the closed Union Station in Union Star, MO, listening on what to expect for the days activities. The 5th Annual Covey Headquarters Tour sponsored by the Heartland Chapter of Quail Unlimited and Missouri Department of Conservation was about to take flight. Twenty-two anxious individuals showed up bright eyed for their first ever fall quail covey whistle count survey and field day. Private Land Conservationist Jeff Powelson was going over the protocol for that morning's quail survey. The early AM workshop starting time would allow the attendees ample time to get set up on the Gary Gagnon farm to participate in a Bobwhite Quail Covey whistle count survey. The landowner, Mr. Gagnon, has been managing his 220 acres for wildlife for the past 5 years and is ready to step up his management by conducting annual fall covey counts. These surveys help hold his management practices accountable in order to see if his time has been well spent. Mr. Gagnon's past experience has given him an estimated 3 to 4 coveys on his farm. This year's survey has proven his work has paid off. The group of attendees was put into four groups and lead by MDC Biologists to help instruct them at each survey point and to help locate the audible quail sounds. With the humming sound of a grain drier in the distant background the first quail call starting around 6:42am and the last ones around 6:55am (in fall, quail typically whistle for a few minutes 20-30 minutes before sunrise) the quick survey gave Mr. Gagnon a boost of confidence on his management schemes. Between all four survey points there were 8 different coveys located by the calls. This is a huge increase from the previous year's results of 4 coveys.

One of the big hits of the day was provided by Jerry Smith of Union Star who provided Belgian Draft horses and wagon. Jerry led the tour with the horse drawn wagon carrying most of the attendees. The Field Day was also topped off with a two hour dog training seminar by Les Simon (The Gun Dog School of Cosby, Missouri) with training on E-collar and commands in training and John Wheeler with conditioning and retrieving.

Here are some comments from individuals who helped with the field day.
(Bill White) "Good outside the box thinking to offer something different and attractive to the quail crowd. One attendee said he no longer had a dog but was going to get one after the promise of what he heard and saw.

The host landowner was very complimentary of the help he had received from you and he would have never have started on his farm, but attended one of the first covey headquarters tours offered and that got him hooked. Keep up the great work you guys. By the way, I have not heard that many quail in one spot since moving to Jeff City!!!!"

(Sean Cleary) "I was surprised in my group that most of them didn't know what to listen for. Most were expecting the familiar "bobwhite" instead of the "covey call".

(Travis Dinsdale) "I was really surprised that most of the attendees didn't know what a "covey call" sounded like. Most of the folks in my group were expecting to hear the familiar "bobwhite" call. Good education on Saturday!"

Landowner and host Gary Gagnon stated "hosting the Quail Habitat Workshop was a truly rewarding experience. It was a great opportunity to share ideas and experiences and learn from other quail enthusiasts, including fellow landowners, and hunters, as well as Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) and Quail Unlimited experts. I particularly enjoyed the fall whistle count, for which my nine-year-old daughter, Laura, got up at 5 a.m. to participate in. The count showed me where management practices are working and highlighted areas where I should focus. Laura's favorite activity was the bird dog field demonstration and training tips, which included live quail, pigeons, and an evasive duck. I want to thank MDC and especially Jeff Powelson, for his enthusiasm, help, and sound advice. It was an informative and fun day for all and I look forward to attending future workshops." Check the 2007 Fall newsletter for the date of the 6th annual Covey Headquarters Tour.



Think Big Picture Before Food Plots

Do you have all quail habitat requirements in place before you plant food plots? With spring on the way I'm sure many of you are planning out your food plots for the coming year. Sure, food plots provide a great source of energy in the winter months, but quail must have good shrubby cover and wildlife friendly grasses before they even think about eating from a food plot that you create. According to numerous studies of fall and winter food habits, the most frequently consumed foods are seeds from native plants like ragweed, desmodium, and partridge pea. In fact, Missouri researchers found that quail living in weedy CRP fields have more fat than quail that inhabit corn and soybean fields. Any extra fat on a quail's body is a good thing. During extreme weather, such as an ice storm or heavy snowfall, a quail with a little extra fat will be able to live a few days without food. Less fat birds will die more quickly of hypothermia or may be forced to venture out in the cold to search for food. By creating shrubby cover and establishing quail-friendly plants (grass, wildflowers, legumes), you will be promoting many of the weedy plants quail need to survive. Weedy plants can also be created by burning, disking, and spraying brome/fescue in fencelines and woody draws. Remember the basis of this newsletter – quail generally stay within 70 feet of shrubby cover. Make sure you are providing good shrubby cover and quail-friendly plants adjacent to each other. Then you can plant your food plots for an additional energy source.

Snowstorms and Shrubby Cover Aaron Jeffries, Area Biologist, Jefferson City, MO

For most of Missouri, early December 2006 will be remembered for the big snowstorm that dumped snow and ice across most of the state. Not exactly good weather for quail, quail hunters, or biologists. After the snowstorm, I was "forced" to cancel every appointment I had for a week, probably like most of my counterparts around the state. There isn't much to look at there when there's 16 inches of snow on the ground. So what is a biologist/quail hunter supposed to do? Work inside or find an excuse to go quail hunting? By Wednesday afternoon, I came up with a good excuse. I also convinced Bill and Doug (two other biologists) to come up with an excuse for a short Thursday morning hunt.

Because of the deep snow and ice, our hunt was rather short. We did manage to find one covey. The covey was in a downed tree structure that the landowner had created in the middle of a warm-season grass field. The landowner had created the pile by cutting and dragging several trees together in a loose pile. After the birds flushed and flew into another downed tree structure, we all looked at each other and smiled. As biologists, we often preach on the importance of shrubby and woody cover for bobwhite quail and other wildlife. When the

winter weather gets bad, as it has this December, quail will move to good shrubby and woody cover for protection from the weather and predators. Remember, the best quail habitat has shrubby cover no more than 70 to 100 feet apart from each other.

Look at the shrubby cover on your farm the next time it snows. The snow is often shallower and melts first in good areas of shrubby cover. Shrubby cover is essential when the weather gets bad whether it is native shrub thickets, blackberry briars, downed tree structures, or edge feathering. Do you have enough to help quail survive? If not, winter is a great time to edge feather and place downed tree structures throughout your farm.

Why is burning (at the proper time) important for quail?

- *Burning will reduce dead grass and increase bare ground, a key for movement and feeding by quail
- *Insects are attracted to recently burned areas. These insects are an important food source for quail
- *Burning can set back thick stands of grass and increase the forbs and legumes that are critical to quail
- *Burning keeps trees and shrubs from replacing the forbs, grass, and legumes that are critical to quail

Recommended Burning Times for Wildlife Management

Native warm-season grasses (Aug. – Feb.) – Best time for quail

- Stimulates wildflower growth and seed germination
 - Sets back thick non-useable stands of native warm-season grass
- CAUTION – burning at this time can cause erosion problems if done on steep slopes

Cool-season grasses with less than 2” of new growth (Feb. – Mar.)

- To prepare for interseeding of legumes into the existing grass stand
- To stimulate cool-season grass
- To stimulate germination of legumes in a rank stand of grass

Cool-season grasses with at least 4-6” of new growth (April – May) – Best time for quail

- To set back thick stands of cool-season grass and encourage annual weeds
 - Kill or set back woody vegetation
 - Useful to open up thick stands of fescue, brome, and orchardgrass
- CAUTION – burning at this time will kill germinated annual lespedeza and ragweed

Native warm-season grasses with 1-3” of new growth (April – May)

- To thicken up a poor stand of native grass
 - Kill or set back woody vegetation
 - **Burning at this time is not recommended for wildlife purposes in thick stands of grass**
- CAUTION – burning at this time will kill germinated annual lespedeza and ragweed

For quail management purposes, you want just enough grass to control erosion. This is a hard pill to swallow with all the money and time spent establishing grasses for wildlife. A perfect looking stand of grass is generally not good for small game. You want your grasslands weedy with plenty of bare ground between the grass clumps. If there is enough grass to carry a fire you should burn every 3 years. Make sure you have a goal in mind when you decide to burn and only burn 1/3 to 1/2 of each field. This will leave some grass for nesting while the burned area will be used as brood habitat. With burning timing is everything to make sure you get the results you want. If you are new to burning, attend a prescribed burn workshop and make sure you have a burn plan before you drop the match. Most NRCS/SWCD offices have burn equipment available for use including drip torches, flappers, rakes, and sprayers.



New Organization Joins the Fight to Bring Back Bobwhite Quail

In November of 2005, the new Quail Forever Organization gained a foothold in the southern part of the state with the formation of the Ozark Plateau Chapter of Quail Forever. Quail Forever was formed on August 10, 2005 by Pheasants Forever to address the loss of quail habitat and the subsequent quail population decline across the U.S. quail range. Both Quail Forever and Pheasants Forever empower local chapters with the responsibility to determine how 100% of their locally raised conservation funds will be spent.

The new Ozark Plateau Chapter will focus on habitat improvement and conservation education, especially focusing on young people. They have already sponsored youth hunts in the region, funded quail habitat practices, and held their very successful first annual banquet last April. Seventy-one new adult members and fourteen youth members joined the local Chapter at the 2006 banquet. For more information about Quail Forever visit or to find a chapter near you www.quailforever.org

Attention Southeast Missouri Landowners!

Want to enhance wildlife on your property?

How? You can choose from 11 different one hour presentations on a variety of conservation topics that pertain to your land. Techniques and tips from the top authorities on many subjects like quail management, deer management, wild turkey needs, forest health and management, pond fishing enhancement, cost share options and addressing trespassing problems. Most sessions will be given twice to allow maximum attendance.

Where? Mineral Area Community College. Farmington, MO

When? Saturday, March 10, 2007; 9 am- 3pm Registration from 8-9 am

Who? Anyone interested in wildlife management - up to 160 participants

For more information and to pre-register: call the Southeast Regional office in Cape Girardeau at 573-290-5730
Subway lunch will be provided for all registered participants.

Did You Know???

It's time to order your trees and shrubs from the MDC nursery. Visit www.mdc.mo.gov to order by computer or contact your local USDA Service Center or MDC office to get an order form. New this year – the quail cover bundle contains enough shrubs to meet the minimum 30 x 50 ft. plot we recommend for quail. Order 3 of these bundles and you will meet the program requirements (per 40 acres) for EQIP, WHIP, and CP33. Favorite quail covey headquarter shrubs include – roughleaf dogwood, wild plum, blackberry, hazelnut, and false indigo bush. If you are worried about deer and rabbit damage purchase shrub protectors and place them around each shrub you plant. Shrub protectors make it easy to identify each shrub so you won't accidentally mow over them and they increase survival.



Where did those birds come from?

A covey of quail was flushed during an early December hunt from the edge feathering pictured at left. The landowner used a chainsaw to create this habitat in Feb. of 2006. When you flush quail do you take note of the habitat they are in? There is no better way to learn the kind of habitat quail prefer by evaluating the habitat they flush from. The habitat at left consisted of several edge feathered trees with plenty of space at ground level for quail to move through. Within the downed trees there was bare ground and several quail friendly plants like desmodium, ragweed, and foxtail. Next time you flush a quail pair, brood, or covey take a moment and study the habitat they come from.

Mark Your Calendars

Prescribed Burn Workshops

Jan. 23 - 6-9PM, Jefferson Co. Courthouse, 300 Main St. Hillsboro, MO
Pre-registration is required by calling 636-789-2441 ext 3

Feb. 3 - 9-Noon, Lamar Memorial Hall, 11th & Broadway, Lamar, MO
Contact Randy Haas to register at 417-629-3423

Feb. 3 - Bates County USDA Office. Contact Scott Sudkamp to register at 417/667-8137

Feb. 10 – 9-Noon, Jasper County Annex Building #1, 105 N. Lincoln, Carthage, MO
Contact Randy Haas to register at 417-629-3423

Quail Management Field Day

Mar. 31 – 9AM, three miles east of Mound City on Hwy. 59. Topics covered - prescribed burning, edge feathering, shrub planting, food plots, CRP management, etc. Contact Jim Pierson to register - 660-442-3173

Banquets

Jan. 20 - St Louis Chapter Quail Unlimited Fund Raiser, Black Hawk Hunting Club
Contact Steve Spezia for details 636-300-1953, ext 308

Jan. 27 - Ozark Border Bobwhites Quail Unlimited Banquet, Owensville, MO
Contact Tom Jacquin at 573-486-3168 for more information

Jan. 27 - Locust Creek Quail Unlimited Banquet, Brookfield, MO.
Contact Richard Techau at 660-258-7267 or NCMgraphics@shighway.com for more information

Feb. 10 – Heartland Chapter Quail Unlimited, St. Joseph, MO
Contact Jeff Powelson for details at 816-364-3662 ext 3

Feb. 17 - Pike Area Quail Unlimited Banquet, St. Clement, MO.
Contact Teresa Wright at 573-594-2429 or charliewright@alltel.net for more information

Mar. 3 - Truman Lake Quail Unlimited Casino Night and Banquet, Clinton, MO.
Contact Jef Hodges at 660-885-7057 or bobwhite@iland.net for more information

Mar. 10 - Gary R Pointer Memorial Quail Unlimited Banquet, Marshall, MO.
Contact Judi Keehart at 660-886-4216 or wkeehart@iland.net for more information

Mar. 10 - West Central Missouri Quail Unlimited Banquet, Harrisonville, MO.
Contact Tom Lampe at 816-884-4862 for more information

Mar. 24 - East Central Missouri Quail Unlimited Banquet, Troy, MO.
Contact Scott Klein at 314-595-8824 for more information

Mar. 30 - Ozark Plateau Quail Forever Spring Banquet, Springfield, MO.
Contact Mike Brooks at 417-207-6766 or mbrooks401@aol.com for more information

Mar. 31 - Pettis County Quail Unlimited Banquet, Sedalia, MO.
Contact Wayne Nierman at 660-826-5877 for more information

State Quail Unlimited Meeting

Feb. 3 - Missouri Quail Unlimited State Meeting. Jefferson City, MO. Contact Jef Hodges at 660-885-7057

National Meeting

Jan. 19-21 – Pheasant Fest, Des Moines, IA. Go to www.iowaeventscenter.com for more information.

Winter Covey Headquarters Calendar

December

Create downed tree structures in areas with little shrubby cover.
Order your Covey Headquarter shrubs (plum, dogwoods, indigo bush, hazelnut, etc.) from the MDC nursery.
Conduct edge feathering and TSI now through March.
Dormant seed native warm-season grasses and wildflowers.

January

Continue to burn warm-season grass CRP fields through March 15.
Interseed wildflowers/legumes in conjunction with your CRP management practices. Cost share is available from USDA.

February

Cut, Cut, Cut – continue your edge feathering projects and create covey headquarters throughout your farm.
Get you spray equipment ready to kill fescue and brome.



The Covey Headquarters Newsletter
3915 Oakland Ave
St. Joseph, MO 64506

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED